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Masters of their trade

8 Utah public school teachers achieve national certification

By **Jennifer Toomer-Cook** Deseret Morning News

They've dissected their knowledge, added to it and reassembled it, and invested \$2,300 — and have great faith their students will be all the better for it. These eight new "master" teachers in Utah public school classrooms have earned certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. They round out a cadre of 85 national board certified teachers working in Utah public schools. Their feat, which can take up to three years, is considered on par with a doctorate degree and expected to make a world of difference in their students' learning. Students of board-certified teachers excel above students whose teachers don't have that certification, according to a study funded by the U.S. Department of Education and released in 2004 by the University of Washington and The Urban Institute. "It's a very grueling process," said Rebecca Anderson, education and licensing specialist at the State Office of Education. "It's very difficult . . . it shows exemplary teaching. It's a master teaching level." The standards board was founded in 1987, following alarming reports on the state of public education, including "A Nation At Risk." It aims to maintain rigorous standards for what teachers should know and be able to do, and certify teachers who elect to meet them. Basically, teachers must demonstrate the quality of their practice and reflect on their actions. Some characterize the process as tearing apart their teaching practices and building them all over again. Certification takes up to three years. Half the teachers fail the certification exam the first time around, said Kaye Chatterton, Utah Education Association director of teaching and learning. But those who finish say they are better able to analyze and meet students' individual needs. The certification helps teachers avoid the "survival mode" pitfall, which tends

to kick in under the crush of big classes and paperwork, national board certified teacher Travis Lemon said. Rather, it keeps them sharp, engaged, focused on how every student learns, the teachers say. "It forces you to stay on top of your game," said LaRue Urquhart, a Bingham High Spanish teacher who just received her national board certification. "I grew as a teacher as a result of it, when you look at these national standards and say to yourself, do I meet these?" said Kathy Sutherland, national board certified teacher and mentor in Davis School District. "You try to prove to yourself that you do, and in some areas, you step up." The teachers don't get a ton more pay for their accomplishment, nor do they shoot to the top of the salary schedule in their school districts. But the state, districts and schools have made strides in rewarding their accomplishments. Parents at Wasatch Elementary in Provo came up with money to help four teachers seek national board certification, principal Colleen Densley said. Alpine and Weber districts offer \$500 annual stipends to national board certified teachers. Davis gives \$1,000 a year. Granite provides a \$1,300 annual stipend and 10 scholarships a year to help teachers obtain national board certification. Jordan District offers a \$1,000 annual stipend for the 10-year life of the certificate, plus full- and half-fee scholarships, and gives teachers permission to take time off. The Utah State Office of Education offers 39 teachers partial fee scholarships worth \$1,150, Anderson said. The state also has a \$20,000 grant from State Farm Insurance to pay for substitute teachers so candidates can attend workshops four times a year. And Utah Legislature last week gave \$500,000 to help with costs related to national board certification or tests to meet federal highly qualified teacher status, confirmed Rep. Kory Holdaway, R-Taylorsville, who sponsored the bill to do so. Several teachers believe financial incentives are directly linked to the numbers of national board certified teachers in districts and states. Consider: North Carolina offers national board certified teachers a 12 percent pay raise, covers certification fees and gives teachers three days off to work on the project. Last year, that state had more than 8,300 national board certified teachers, and added 1,535 more by the close of 2005, the board reported. There are 47,503 national board certified teachers nationwide. "Teachers in Utah do not make a lot of money ... they can barely make ends meet. So when they're having to come up with another \$1,150 (if they get fee assistance), along with the extra time and effort, it's too much for them," Densley said. "If they get even a little support ... they grab hold of it. ... When people will step up to ... provide the opportunity, it's my experience, that a high majority of teachers in Utah would go for it."

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Additional caption: LaRue Urquhart is a new master teacher. **Credit:** Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret Morning News



Additional caption: Master teacher Sara Andreason is a literacy facilitator at Westland Elementary in West Jordan. **Credit:** Scott G. Winterton, Deseret Morning News



Additional caption: LaRue Urquhart, a Bingham High Spanish teacher, is among eight Utah master teachers. **Credit:** Jeffrey D. Allred, Deseret Morning News

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